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SPECIAL HANDLING

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20 November 1961

MEMORANDUM FOR Secretary McNamara
Secretary Gilpatric
Mr. Pierre Salinger
Mr. McGeorge Bundy
General Taylor
Secretary Alexis Johnson

SUBJECT: Satellite Reconnaissance Launch

This memorandum outlines some steps being taken to effect immediately a major change in public information policy concerning the SAMOS project. The intent simply is to avoid any official government confirmation that these particular satellite launches are SAMOS launches, or are in any manner connected with the subject of reconnaissance.

The first launch of a new SAMOS project payload is presently scheduled for Tuesday, November 21. This will be the first launch of the recoverable subsystem which we have previously called "E-5." The external launch configuration of the overall vehicle is noticeably different from any launched previously by the ATLAS-AGENA B booster.

As you know, this project has been conducted in the past as an ordinary Department of Defense project, and has received considerable general publicity in the last several years. For this reason, it will not be possible to achieve immediately the complete degree of close security which is desired for satellite reconnaissance projects. Regardless of any information release and particularly if no official acknowledgment of the launch is made it is likely that there will be a considerable amount of press speculation relative to this launch, with previous releases, public discussion, Congressional testimony, and speculation forming the basis of the articles. Moreover, a substantial part of the speculation is likely to be correct. In this situation, our objective is

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SPECIAL HANDLING

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SPECIAL HANDLING

to have the least publicity possible; however, regardless of the amount that occurs, it is essential, I believe, that there be no official confirmation of any connection between the payload configuration of this vehicle and the subject of reconnaissance since this vehicle configuration is unique and will be used throughout a whole series of SAMOS flights. As new payload configurations appear in the forthcoming months, speculation is bound to become more uncertain if the new press policy is observed.

Our planned action is to make no release and to offer no comments whatever except for the attached statement, which will be released as indicated.

In accordance with present national policy, all results of this and subsequent SAMOS launches will be handled within the special high security classification established at national level for this subject, and any information on results or lack of results will be classified TOP SECRET, with need-to-know required for access to such information. Accordingly, there will be no scheduled briefings on this launch or its results outside of the appropriate intelligence elements.

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JOSEPH V. CHARYK
Under Secretary of the Air Force

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A satellite employing an ATLAS/AGENA B booster combination was successfully launched today by the Air Force from Ft. Argus, California. The satellite is carrying a number of classified test components.

(This announcement will be issued after satellite launch at Vandenberg to local media by telephone and also to Los Angeles media by DCAS or SAFOI-Los Angeles. This release will also be used as answer-to-query in Washington by Air Force Press Desk.)

**A satellite employing an ATLAS/AGENA B booster combination
exploded on its launching pad today at Ft. Argus, California. An
investigation is under way to determine the cause.**

(For use in event of explosion on the pad.)

A satellite employing an ATLAS/AGENA B booster combination exploded in flight today shortly after leaving the launching pad at Pt. Arguello, California. An investigation is under way to determine the cause.

(For release in the event of an in-flight explosion within sight and hearing of ground observers.)

A satellite employing an ATLAS/AGENA B booster combination was destroyed by the Range Safety Officer today when a malfunction caused a deviation in its planned flight path.

(For release in the event of destruct action within sight and hearing of ground observers.)